

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

**QUESTION 654-18(3):
LIVING WAGE AND NORTHWEST TERRITORIES CHILD BENEFIT**

March 6, 2019

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, and they concern the living wage, and particularly the NWT Child Benefit. What we know from the most recent calculation, which was the same as 2017, is that this reference family of two adults and two children would not qualify for the NWT Child Benefit. My first question for the Minister is: how was the threshold for the NWT Child Benefit set? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have just taken over the portfolio for Education, Culture and Employment in April. I do not know how the income threshold was developed for the child benefit. I will have to get back to the Member with an answer on how that income threshold was developed and defined.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister's willingness to find that information. I hope she will be able to answer the next question, which is whether the thresholds can be changed, and what effort would it take to change them and raise them?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I would like to think that all thresholds can be changed and negotiated. I know that it's a partnership with the federal government, so I will have to check out on how that works, if we define the threshold or if the federal government defines the threshold. However, as stated yesterday, we are in a complete review of our income support. I believe, when we are doing that process, then it makes sense to look at our NWT child benefit, as well, so I will look into that as soon as this session is finished.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister trying to answer that question, as well. I also wonder, as well as adjusting the threshold, whether the child benefit thresholds could be sensitive by region to higher-cost-of-living situations and lower-cost-of-living situations? Would it be possible to target the thresholds in that way, by region?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I do know that I will look into that, as well. I can't say if the Child Tax Benefit is defined by regions, but I know that most of our programs are defined by regions. Income support, we just did a review of the regions, and, like I said, we are doing a complete review of that program as soon as this session is finished. Any income that we can provide better to parents, my understanding or my interpretation is that anything we can do to support parents is the best thing we can do and is the best thing we should be doing. My commitment is that I will be looking at all services that we provide to parents within the control of Education, Culture and Employment and doing as comprehensive a review as possible, with the goal of supporting parents.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. The Minister and I share the same goal of assisting parents to help their children grow up with everything that they need in terms of food, accommodation, and so on, so that the poverty cycle is broken, especially by people who are working full-time. My final question here, and likely for the same answer, I realize, is whether the NWT child benefit could be indexed to inflation. The federal government recently took that step with the Canada child benefit, and it means, of course, that the benefit retains its value. That is an important feature, so can the Minister also look into that?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I will make a commitment to look into that, as well. I do want to state, though, that sometimes, if there are questions that are really specific, it does help if the Ministers kind of get a heads-up. You don't have to even give me the actual questions, but, if you can, tell me the topic because that does give me an indication of what I should be looking for. The NWT child benefit is one that I am not as versed in because that is a partnership with the federal government and therefore it's a set rate, but I will commit to looking into it. I have more authority over my income support programs and my childcare programs. Always, though, if they are direct questions on a specific topic, it's always better to give the Minister a heads-up. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.